

Testimony for Magnet School Funding by Sarah Nicholls, Parent of an 8th grader at Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School (ACES) in Hamden, CT

Good Afternoon. My name is Sarah Nicholls and I am a parent of an 8th grade student (who has been there since kindergarten) at ACES Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School.

Magnet schools are important because they meet our need for children to be educated in a way that will allow them to be ready to take on the challenges of the world they will inherit. Ten years ago when I was looking at schools for my daughter who was getting ready for kindergarten, that was definitely on my mind. Knowing research shows that music, art and physical activity have a positive impact on children's ability to learn and grow, and that there are benefits to having a second language, which children learn more easily than adults, I was excited to find that Wintergreen offered all four (music, art, gym and Spanish) as specials, and that children get two of these specials every day.

Technology and diversity were two other areas of focus at Wintergreen that were also particularly important to me. Opportunities to use computers and learn about changing technology as well as to get to know people from many different towns, races, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds were all part of the educational environment offered at Wintergreen. And because I am a working parent, it was also nice to learn that Wintergreen offers both a longer school day and a longer school year, which means students have more time for learning and don't lose as much academically over the shorter summer.

What I wasn't familiar with at that point was how dedicated the teachers and staff are to the making the learning environment as nurturing and challenging as possible to meet the needs of each of the students in the school. I have spent many hours volunteering in the classroom and on field trips, as well as doing special projects at the school, and this has given me first hand experience with the learning environment and the community that has evolved over the years. When my daughter first got to the school I became familiar with the class buddies program where classes of older students were assigned to classes of younger students and would get together to do activities once in a while. That way when they saw each other or passed each other in the hall they could acknowledge and support each other. In the past few years the children of all grades were challenged to come up with the school constitution that gives guidance for their own behaviors and interacting with each other at school. Kindness, understanding and compassion for self and others is encouraged throughout the school day.

My child has benefitted greatly from her time at ACES Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School. She has been challenged academically throughout and continues to love to learn. She has also been encouraged to grow into herself as a person and to take on more and more responsibilities as she was able to handle them, such as being a bus buddy for younger children after school, tutoring younger students in

math and being her class representative for student government. She has been encouraged to challenge herself in areas such as playing in the jazz band and taking a part in a play that involved singing, something she didn't want to do at first. She has taken part in community service efforts, enrichment activities, the latest of which involves making a movie with a prize-winning movie director, and she even got to sing with other students and the New Haven Symphony. She has made wonderful friends from many different towns in Connecticut and is comfortable with people from very diverse backgrounds. She is skilled with technology, and as she approaches the end of her time at Wintergreen, she is ready to take on the challenges of high school. In my opinion, the time she and her friends have spent at this ACES magnet school, has put them on a path to becoming the kind of adults that will make this world a better place. Since I believe that is exactly what we will need going forward, I would argue state support of magnet schools in Connecticut, that allows for growth in terms of numbers of students served and in sustainable funding that will cover ever-increasing salaries and expenses, is essential.

My hope is that with sustainable funding for magnet schools that supports their educational efforts and growth, we as a society will begin to see that the types of educational opportunities being offered at magnet schools should be more available to all children. If we do not provide the funds magnet schools need, we may find that many of our children have to settle for less, which means they will be less prepared when it is their turn to lead us into the future.

Thank you.

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